

POINTS OF VIEW

LETTERS

Do right thing

I support all of the difficult decisions that our school board has courageously made as I have observed their performances over the past several years.

The board has consistently viewed each issue not only on its individual merit, but on its effects, rewards or ramifications toward the entire school district and community.

In recent controversies such as overcrowding in Beechview Elementary, the reconstruction of the Wooddale parking lot, and criticism toward current curriculum, it may have been easiest for the board to give in to repeated criticism where the interests of a minority may have been fulfilled while unfavorably rewarding the minority.

I applaud the board members for their integrity as they are attacked month after month by various special interests.

I entrusted the integrity of our school board when they re-addressed sibling priority on Jan. 4, to consider the opportunity of every student equally as they set policy for both current and future schools of choice.

I cannot argue with the theory of sibling priority where all conditions are

ideal and there is a spot for all in the place that they want to be.

Unfortunately, our pride of the district, Highmeadow Common Campus, has been described by some as a "School of Chance" rather than a "School of Choice" as the largest percentage of incoming students continue to be siblings.

As rumors have told me that specific notices of the Jan. 4 meeting reached each Highmeadow family, I expect our board treated the barrage of letters and comments fairly and professionally while remembering that they are not representative of an entire school community, but merely one politically active special interest acting on convictions which definitely deserve a high level of respect.

My motive in speaking out on this issue is not based on sour grapes but is merely to promote fairness and equal opportunities to all Farmington families and students while re-creating harmony among all of our fine schools.

While the opinions expressed in this letter are clearly my own, I am confident that they echo comments of a multitude of parents, many of whom seem to express them through all but the correct channels.

I am relying on our responsible

school board to, once again, do the right thing on this sensitive issue. Steve Kaplan, Farmington Hills

Tax no compromise

Another opportunity... another disappointment. Michigan taxpayers are again led down the promised path, only to be given the promise of higher taxes for no added service.

Remember the promises of "educational reform" and "real tax reductions" as our Lansing legislators heralded Senate Bill No. 1 as the opportunity to produce real educational reform and cost controls to produce real tax reductions? As legislators approached their self-imposed deadline two plans were developed; one by the House and another by the Senate. Governor Engler proposed a compromise plan. On Christmas Eve, a "compromise plan" was approved, and endorsed by the Governor.

The only compromise made was to the integrity (?) of the political system. According to the "Detroit News" (Dec. 19, 1993) the House plan would have resulted in a tax cut of \$300 million, the Senate version a \$1 billion tax cut, and the Governor's compromise plan a

\$500 million reduction. What was achieved through the "compromise" process was a plan to have the voters approve either a \$44 million or a \$59 million net tax increase ("Detroit News" Dec. 26, 1993).

My analogy to this compromise plan is as follows:

I have a used car for sale, I'm asking \$10,000 for it, you offer \$9,000. We compromise at \$11,000. Lansing's definition of compromise, not mine.

Ken Lindesmith, Rochester

'IT' is terrible

I've looked at IT from the Village Mall corner. I've looked at IT from the northeast, the Korner Barber Shop area.

I have looked at IT as a driver might, from west Grand River and from the east.

While walking, I have stopped and taken a good look from across the street by the Heeny-Sundquist establishment.

For the life of me, I cannot see how

the new construction on the Masonic Lodge grounds at the northeast corner of Grand River and Farmington Road is any improvement over what was there in years past.

Indeed, the whole mess looks like some kind of contemporaneous pet cemetery.

When I first heard that the cement blocks were textured, I thought, "Hey, maybe that's a good idea." Wrong. Then I asked if the blocks were to be covered by evergreen ground cover of some variety, myrtle or pachysandra, perhaps. I was told, "No."

Then came the holiday season, and the concoction was decorated with several small evergreen trees in pots with multi-colored holiday paper. Then came the evergreen roping, draped in a scallopy fashion over the textured blocks, and, finally, the ultimate in yukiness, the black plastic penguins.

Before the holiday concoctions went in place, one person said to me, when I asked for her opinion of the new corner, "When you first see the corner from a distance, you think it is something you want to see (for after all it is one of Farmington's historic corners), but when you see it, you wish you hadn't."

Maybe next time.

Lee S. Peel, Farmington

Parents, educators need to teach responsibility

Most of us who are raising children in the '90s grew up during "the celebration of the individual" that was so much a part of the '60s and '70s. The personalism that dominated thinking in those decades was engaging. There was intense concentration on ourselves and our potential. It was a period of self-interest when books like "Looking Out for Number One" rose to the top of the best-seller lists.

This focus on individual rights proved fertile ground for the civil rights movement and feminism. There's no arguing that building up the individual is an essential part of developing a strong society. But there has to be a balance. The moral fiber of our country is eroding and will continue to erode until we strike a balance between personalism and responsibility to our families and our communities.

I suggest the '90s are the time when

we can — indeed, must — find that balance. Parents and educators who talk about teaching values have begun the movement. For the benefit of our children, we must put the individual into perspective.

Educators and parents are stronger because of the "self-fulfillment" message with which they've grown up. But if society is to move forward, we must couple our message of individual growth with a message of mutual respect and responsibility.

Look around in the malls, read any newspaper or magazine, watch any newscast, listen to the "message" sent through music, movies and television shows targeted at our kids: Untrammeled, in-your-face "me-ism" is all the rage.

What began as personal development has wound up creating self-centered, irresponsible children and adults. Personal responsibility seems

GUEST COLUMNIST



THOMAS HERBST

What began as personal development has wound up creating self-centered, irresponsible children and adults.

to have been uncoupled in the ensuing decades and it's going to be tough getting back on track again.

I keep a copy of "Education for Character" on my desk. Subtitle for the book is "How our schools can teach respect and responsibility." Author Thomas Lickona suggests respect and responsibility are the fourth and fifth R's. I concur — strongly. Speaking of responsibility, parents and educators have a duty to combine efforts to reinforce daily the importance of these values. These are the core values upon which all other values of a well-ordered society are taught.

Respect and responsibility do not negate personalism; rather, they enhance it. Respect for oneself means being proud of the individuality that makes each person unique.

Further, there ought to be a growing awareness of the talents and gifts we

each have to share, coupled with a sense of obligation to share and achieve at our best level. When children learn to be proud of themselves and what they can achieve, they will be ready to understand the special talents their fellow students bring to the classroom.

When parents and teachers successfully celebrate and make children accountable for the potential held within themselves; then, perhaps, when the next generation of youngsters reaches adulthood, they will understand the responsibility they have to create a family, a community and a world where everyone must do his/her part.

Thomas Herbst is headmaster of Kensington Academy, an independent, coed, Catholic day school for students prekindergarten through the eighth grade located in Bloomfield Hills.

Legislature misses mark on real education reform

The more I think about it, the more dismayed I get at the so-called education reform package the Legislature managed to pass in an odd mixture of frenzy and exhaustion on Christmas Eve.

So we get to vote on tax policy on March 15. If we don't pass the ballot plan (hiking the sales tax and cutting the personal income tax), we get the statutory plan (jumping the income tax and the single business tax). Big deal.

Do we get a big property tax cut, as promised? Sort of, depending on which tax plan we get stuck with and where you live, but certainly not the big drop most folks are expecting.

What about school quality — what our kids actually learn — that supposedly was at the core of this whole effort? Virtually nothing.

Whether or not a wholesale choice plan would have brought improving competition into the monopolistic world of K-12 schools is a moot argument; we're not going to have it. Charter schools, which were grudgingly approved, likely will turn out to be small potatoes.

Longer school year? Forget it. Too expensive (although the evidence I have seen indicates conclusively that the longer kids are in class, the more they learn.) The legislation does call for schools to add one more hour of instruction per day. Eventually.

Core curriculum? With no certain way attached to measure what kids actually learn, mandating a core curriculum from Lansing merely centralizes what hitherto has been a hodgepodge of locally selected subjects.

Worse, nobody's accountable for what the students do (not) learn. And with the "foundation grant" paid directly from Lansing to school districts, local voters have now lost the local tax millage vote, the only tool they had to hold schools accountable for performance.

I've been involved in the education reform movement at the national level for a number of years now. I serve on the board of the Center for Education in the Economy, a leading reform group, and have participated in countless meetings and conferences on how to improve our schools. As far as the national school reform community is concerned, Michigan simply isn't a player. Never has been; no reason now to believe it ever will be.

The strategy for getting something concrete



PHILIP POWER

The strategy for getting something concrete done about educational performance in our schools is painfully simple: Define what we expect kids to learn; develop a fair and demanding assessment system to measure what they learn; associate rewards with success and penalties with failure.

done about educational performance in our schools is painfully simple: Define what we expect kids to learn; develop a fair and demanding assessment system to measure what they learn; associate rewards with success and penalties with failure.

This is not rocket science; this is common sense.

That's why it is so disheartening to realize that at every point where the governor and Legislature could have adopted here in Michigan the proven components of the national reform model, they chose not to.

Over the next couple of months, there will be much fire and brimstone about the two tax plans before us. That's fine, but let's never forget during the debate that the subject at hand is tax reform, not education or school improvement.

Sorry, Virginia. There is no Santa Claus. Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. You can reach him by touchtone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1880.

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